

Ps 87:3,4,5
Ps 25:3
Ps 143:5,6
Ps 40:3
Ps 25:2; Hy 47:4
John 4:1-42
Canons of Dort, I.3
John 4:34

Yarrow, February 7, 2010

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Jesus did not come into this world to eat, to drink, to enjoy His life; He had other priorities. As He says in the words of our text: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."

Interesting. We prefer to do our own thing, be boss in our own lives. That's the great Canadian way; we want to be free to make our own decisions.

Jesus' life was one of self-denial for the sake of the Father's will. And self-denial, brothers and sisters, is nothing less than our salvation!

At the same time, Jesus' priority is an example that we are to follow. We too have not been placed on earth in order to eat and to drink and to be merry. Whether at work or during time off, always it is for us to do the will of God, to accomplish the work of Him who sent us.

I summarise the sermon with this theme:

JESUS SINGLE GOAL IN LIFE WAS TO DO THE WILL OF HIS SENDER.

1. What the will of God for Jesus was
2. Why this was the will of God for Jesus
3. How Jesus carried out this will of God

1. What the will of God for Jesus was

The words of our text form part of the conversation Jesus had with His disciples. To be more precise: the words of our text are Jesus' response to the disciples.

The disciples –we gather from preceding verses– had gone to town to buy lunch for themselves and their Master while Jesus rested at the well outside the Samaritan town of Sychar. Upon their return, the disciples urged Jesus to have a bite to eat. He refused. Said Jesus to them (vs 32): "I have food to eat of which you do not know." That statement made the disciples wonder whether someone had brought Jesus lunch while they themselves had been away shopping (vs 33). But Jesus was not going to let His disciples remain puzzled on that point; here was opportunity to instruct them. So Jesus interrupted their questionings with the words of our text: My food has not been brought by another, My food is not even buns or pizza; My food is instead "to do the will of Him who sent Me," it is "to finish His work."

Puzzling words these are. Food: we think of the stomach, and so of nourishment, of sustenance, of the energy sources needed to keep the body going: bread, vegetables, and the like. Not so Jesus; He claims to live on a menu of *action*, of doing the will of His Sender, of finishing His work. The stomach, He knows, is not what it's about; life is about *doing* the will of God. This is what Jesus sets out to teach His disciples.

Jesus, we need to note, is in the district of Samaria. He had wanted to travel from Judea (in the south) to Galilee (in the north), and the shortest road ran through the region of Samaria; along that route the journey could be made in three days (walking). Why Jesus chose that shortest road? He did

so not simply because He wished to get to Galilee quickly. The reason is instead told to us in vs 4 of our chapter: “He *needed* to go through Samaria” (NKJV; NIV: Jesus “had to go through Samaria”). The English word ‘needed’ (or ‘had to’) translates a word from the original language that denotes *divine compulsion*. Says John in this verse: Jesus had to pass through Samaria because God wanted Him to; it was divinely necessary, it was according to God’s eternal decree that Jesus pass through Samaria en route to Galilee.

Why it was divinely necessary, why it was in God’s decree for Jesus to pass through Samaria? We could refer here simply to the Canons of Dort, chap 1, Art 3: “so that men may be brought to faith, God mercifully sends heralds...to whom He will and when He wills.” And we could say: that’s the answer to why God sent Jesus through Samaria, and so we need say no more about it; God was pleased to have His Word brought to the district of Samaria.

Indeed, brothers and sisters, that turns out to be the answer. God wanted His Word to be brought to the district of Samaria. Yet we cannot consider the question answered so easily. For: who were the Samaritans? Why should *they* receive the Word? Who was the woman with whom Jesus spoke? Why should *she* receive the Word? We need answers to these questions to understand Jesus’ words to His disciples in our text.

a. From vs 9 we learn that the Jews and Samaritans of Jesus’ day did not get on. It’s what we read: “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.” Hence the woman’s surprised question to Jesus: “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” (vs 9a). Why Jews and Samaritans did not get on? That had to do with the history of the Samaritans. When Sennacherib of Assyria took the northern tribes of Israel into exile, he emptied the land of all but the poorest. And to fill up the land again, and at the same time to prevent any local nationalism arising in that impoverished remnant, Sennacherib took other peoples –heathens– and transplanted them into the land of Israel. These two peoples –the remaining impoverished Israelites and the newly arrived heathens– soon enough began to mix, to inter-marry, and so to form one race. That race was known as “Samaritans”. The Samaritans of Jesus’ day, then, were a mixed race; they had some Jewish blood, some heathen. That in itself was enough to make the pure-blooded Jews look down on them as *less*. Hence: “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.”

But this hybrid character was not the only thing which the Jews had against the Samaritans. As their blood was mixed, adulterated, so –said the Jews– was their religion. For the Samaritans accepted as Word of God only the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, those five books written by Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They did not accept the works and words of the prophets, did not accept those Bible books that told about the kingship of David in Jerusalem, that told about the temple in Jerusalem, etc. Hence the dispute between Jews and Samaritans as referred to in vs 20; Jews insisted that God be worshiped in Jerusalem, while Samaritans (referring to Deuteronomy) defended Mt Gerizim as the place for worship (Dt 27:3). Samaritans and Jews: what divided them in first instance was history, and because of history their faith also was not according to God’s full revelation. And that gave to the Jews justification to look down upon the Samaritans, to avoid them, have nothing to do with them.

It should be pointed out, however, that the Samaritan rejection of most of the Old Testament did not mean that these people did not believe in God and accept His promise of a Saviour. Rather, the expectation of a coming Messiah lived quite strongly among these Samaritans. As the woman also said to Jesus in vs 25: “I know that the Messiah is coming.” These Samaritans knew what God had promised in the Pentateuch through Moses: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you...” (Dt 18:15). And they knew too that this Messiah would restore true belief in God, would teach, would prompt people to worship God in truth. So it cannot be said that these Samaritans were

crass heathens; they were not. They were and remained part of God's covenant people, be it of mixed parentage.

Now God wanted Jesus to travel through Samaria, wanted Jesus, then, to travel through a town shunned by Jesus' own people. The fact that Jesus had to pass through this land of rejected people adds a new dimension to that phrase I quoted earlier from the Canons of Dort: "God mercifully sends heralds...to whom He wills...." For: God *sent* Jesus to these rejected Samaritans to bring the gospel. Why would He do that?!

b. There is another factor that needs our attention. Not only did God send His messenger to this shunned *race of people* called Samaritans; God also saw to it that the person Jesus met at the well was a *woman*.

A woman. You may know that devote Jews of Jesus' day made a point of thanking God daily that He did not make them "Gentiles or tax collectors or women". The woman: much as men needed the woman, the men of Jesus' day placed her at the bottom of the social ladder. In their judgement it was not fitting that a man should walk with a woman in public, let alone talk to a woman in public. That explains the response of the disciples in vs 27: "they marvelled that [Jesus] was talking with a woman."

To make matters worse still: look at what sort of woman this was. She lived in a de facto relation, was not legally married to her companion. Five husbands she's had, "and he whom [she] now has is not [her] husband" (vs 18). That was contrary to the principle of "leave" and "cleave" –note the order!– that God had ordained in the beginning.

God's divine will for Jesus was that He *had* to pass through Samaria, and there meet up with a *Samaritan*, nay, with a Samaritan *woman*, more, with a woman of *questionable character*! "God ... sends heralds ... to whom He will...." But why, O God, would You send Your herald to *this* person?! We wouldn't do it; what, in fact, have we to do the harlots and the homeless of our society! But such was God's will; Jesus "needed" to pass through Samaria, and in Samaria "needed to" meet up with this woman.... This was God's will, and it was Jesus' obligation to do that will and finish God's work..., and so to go and talk to her.

And what did Jesus talk about with this woman? Surprise, beloved: He spoke about a subject that –to the mind of the pious Jew of His day– did not concern Samaritans, and certainly did not concern women! O true, the conversation begins innocently enough: Jesus asks for water. But quickly the conversation changes to matters deeper than food and drink; Jesus talks about matters of religion, of waters that give eternal life, that quench all thirst forever. And in due time the conversation touches on that point of dispute between Jews and Samaritans, that point about where people are supposed to worship God. And from there follows the revelation on Jesus' part that He is Himself the Messiah for whom the Samaritans were looking.

Converse with a Samaritan? Unacceptable practice among the Jews of Jesus' day! Appear in public with a woman? Unacceptable practice for the Jews of Jesus' day! Discuss theology with a woman, particularly with a Samaritan woman? Most unacceptable practice for the Jews of Jesus' day! The Jews could give you a list of reasons as long as their arm –based, said they, on Scripture and Confession– as to why there was no place for such conversations with a Samaritan woman.

Yet God willed that Jesus travel through Samaria, and in His providence led circumstances such that Jesus met up with a woman, *this* woman. Jesus understood it: it was the will of God that He should converse with this sinful child of Abraham, this member of the weaker sex. Jesus realised that God worked in such a way that the pieces of the puzzle fell together just this way, and so Jesus makes it His business to "finish" the work God began when He led Him through Samaria to meet the woman; Jesus makes it His business to complete this work of God by conversing with the woman even though being caught with this woman would give Him a stigma. "God mercifully sends heralds ... to whom He will,"

and so it was that Jesus, “by the will of God” ‘found’ Himself in the district of Samaria talking with an adulterous woman. And again we’ve got in our minds that question *why*. Why is *this* the will of God for Jesus? Why must Jesus go to such shunned people as the Samaritans, to such a down-and-outer as this adulterous woman?! It brings us to our second point:

2. Why this was the will of God for Jesus

Jesus, my brothers and sisters, realises what God wishes Him to do, and does not challenge it. The disciples have so many questions, and we do too, but Jesus says simply: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me....” Including if God sends Him to Samaria and asks Him to ignore all accepted social practices....

Why does Jesus do God’s will? Why does He obey, even say that He cannot but obey, this is His *food*?

Here we are to notice, brothers and sisters, the term which Jesus uses in our text to describe God. His term for God is: “Him who sent Me.” And we know: the Sender is greater than the one who is sent; in fact, the one who is sent is obligated to carry out the mandate received from his sender.

Who sent Jesus into the world? *God* sent Jesus. With what mandate? It’s recorded for us in the previous chapter. John is inspired by God –ch 3:16– to write this: “for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” That word is followed by vs 17: “for God sent the Son into the world ... that the world through Him might be saved.” Note that: out of *love* for the world He had once made, God sent His son into the world in order to save. Save who? The *world*: vs 17: “that the world through Him might be saved.” God’s interest, in other words, was not restricted to the Jews, those pure-blooded children of Abraham to whom belonged the covenant; God’s interest was directed also outside the church. He so loved the world that He gave up His only Son, and He sent that Son into the world to save the world. That includes, for example, also Samaritans, includes also Samaritan women, includes even adulterous Samaritan women. It was to save sinners that God sent His only Son into the world, and it was for the *same reason* that God willed Jesus to travel through Samaria and speak with this woman. Canons of Dort: “God mercifully sends heralds of this most joyful message to whom He will and when He wills so that men may be brought to faith” – and that graciously includes this adulterous woman of Samaria. God’s work of saving sinners was now *focused* on this adulterous woman; at this point in salvation history it was *for her sake* that God had sent His Son into the world, and so now Jesus had to speak to *her* about the redemption God was working in Jesus Christ. That’s the force of God *sending* His Son.

“Jews have no dealings with Samaritans”, Jewish men do not speak with women in public, do not discuss theology with women. Jesus did not submit to the practices of His day, did not use the custom of the day to protest the openings God laid before Him and say that doors of contact were in fact closed doors. Never mind the traditions and habits of men; Jesus carried out what He knew to be the will of God, and so dared to claim that speaking with the Samaritan woman was His food.

That brings us to our last point:

3. How Jesus carried out the will of God

Simply speaking with this woman was not the sum-total of the work God wished Jesus to do. Jesus had been sent into the world to save not just this woman but to save *all* who had been chosen to life. The woman of our chapter, after Jesus had communicated that most joyful message to her, returned to Sychar, told her town’s folk about the man who told her all she had ever done, and laid before the people the possibility that this might be the awaited Christ (vs 29). Result? Vs 30: “they went out of the city and came to Him.”

Should Jesus now say: 'I've done My bit, said My piece, now it's lunch time'? Not so Jesus. These people walking across the fields needed the gospel, needed to know that God sent Jesus into the world to save sinners. So it was that Jesus could not now pause to eat; though the disciples urged Him, He knew His priorities lay with these lost children of Adam who of themselves lay under the curse of sin. There they came across the fields, seeking confirmation on the report of the woman, seeking evidence whether Jesus was in fact the Saviour of the world. He could not now stop for lunch; says Jesus: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work." God sovereignly sends people to Me; now I must complete that work, must speak to them.

Then it's true: usually there is a period of time –normally some four months– between seeding and harvesting. But God had sent Jesus into the world to work salvation, and that meant that *urgency* had developed in the world. Now the battle between God and Satan was coming to a head, now there was no time any more for the seed to be sown in peace and the harvest to be awaited in leisure. The coming of the Son of God into the world meant that fruit must appear quickly, lest there be no opportunity for the fruit to mature at all. Now would the battle be big, now would the fight be intense, now there was no time for people who heard the word to dilly-dally about a decision; in this new dispensation in the kingdom of God, seed-time and harvest stood one next to the other. Jesus, as Saviour of the world, could then not sit leisurely by chewing His lunch while the harvest was ready for reaping. Busy He had to be, busy bringing in these fruits for eternal life.

Then the disciples may urge Jesus to eat, may see no need for Jesus to give up His lunch for rejects as these. But Jesus knows the work which the Father gives Him; "lift up your eyes," says Jesus to His disciples, "and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest." There they come, the people of Sychar, dressed in their traditional white robes, ready for the harvest. "Already the reaper receives wages and gathers fruit for eternal life." The seed's been sown (says Jesus) and because of the urgency involved with My coming into the world must the fruit come quickly. And behold the harvest My Sender gives; here are sinners –and as children of your times you'll certainly agree that these are sinners– here are sinners coming across the field so that I may gather them into the everlasting life set aside for those whom the Father has chosen. For –says Jesus to His disciples– God sends His messengers to whom He will (despite Jewish practices), and now God sent Me to these Samaritans, and it was all done because God so loved the world, including even such outcasts as these, so that even despised people might be brought to faith and so not perish but have eternal life. Accepted practices notwithstanding, O My disciples, God grants a quick harvest from the ranks of persons shunned by Jewish leaders; sower and reaper rejoice together, rejoice at the same time.

That faith was in fact growing in these Samaritans who crossed the fields to visit Jesus is pointed up by what John records in vs 39: "many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified." And later: "many more believed because of His own word. Then they said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world'" (vs 41f).

Here was instruction for the disciples, and great comfort for them too. Was Jesus' food really bread and butter, did His stomach come first? They found out not. Was Jesus' food this that He wanted to satisfy the teachers of the day, abide by the practices these teachers had gleaned out of Scripture and confession, refuse to rock the boat? They found out not. Jesus carried out the will of God by making the most of the opportunities that God presented to Him, and cared not a fig for the thinking of the leaders of His day. *What did God want of Him*: that was for Jesus *the* question. It was for the sake of sinners that Jesus came into the world, and God laid before Him occasion to talk with the woman at the well and her town's folk; so Jesus knew Himself bound to use the opportunities received.

This diligence to do the Father's will, this insistence that saving sinners was His food and drink, became instruction too to the disciples. For –vs 38– Jesus sent them out to reap that for which they did

not labour. As the fruits were ready for picking among the Samaritans, so fruits could be ready for picking elsewhere, even among those who were far from the fullness of the truth, simply because God was pleased to use even incomplete theology or teachers who didn't quite bring the whole gospel in order to make a people hunger for the full truth and –when they hear it– embrace it readily and come to full faith. “Others have laboured,” Jesus tells His disciples, “and [now] you may enter into their labour and do the harvesting.”

So it was that the disciples in later years could preach the gospel hither and thither to Gentiles who had heard of the Jewish faith, had expressed a bit of an interest, and lo, it was these proselytes – and not the Jews, those members of the chosen race– who ended up forming the bulk of the early New Testament Church. For synagogue preachers around the world had laboured, but the apostles of Jesus Christ were allowed to enter into their labour and reap the harvest.

Here, brothers and sisters, is comfort, great comfort for us today. Jesus' food was to do the will of His Sender. So when God in heaven led Jesus' path to the anguish and hellish rejection of the cross, Jesus did not hesitate, did not shy away from the horrors of the cross because He thought of His own comfort, His own stomach, His own wishes. He quietly went – never mind the horror of crucifixion, never mind the stigma of crucifixion, never mind the hurt of being rejected by the people, by His God. He went, because He wanted to fulfil the Father's purpose. And the blessed result is that there is salvation for Jew and Greek, for rich and poor, for adulteresses and for rapists! Jesus did not pursue the desires of His stomach, of His flesh, and so there is salvation for you and for me!! Here in John 4 we receive a foretaste of the total self-denial Jesus presented on the cross – for our salvation. Yes, here is comfort beyond compare!

That glorious gospel, beloved, carries with it a task. That task is this: your food must be to do the will of your Saviour. Jesus did not consider Himself, did not consider the accepted standards of His day; He rather gave Himself to do whatever God wished Him to do. The result of His God-centeredness is our salvation; very well, it is now for us to be equally God-centred – and so show our thankfulness for the wonderful salvation He obtained for us.

So: what is your food, beloved? Is your food, your diet, is what drives you the wish to satisfy your physical appetite? Is it a desire to build a kingdom for yourself, a house, a name? Are the standards and expectations of men important to you? No, beloved, only one thing can be the food of the child of God, and that –like the Saviour– is to do His will. No matter the circumstance, no matter your preferences, no matter the convenience or inconvenience: do the will of the Lord your God. Christ did, for your salvation. Go and do likewise – in thankful imitation of the Saviour who readily did the will of His Sender, for your salvation.